

San Diego Unified School District to cut more than 400 jobs

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The San Diego Unified School District Board voted last week to cut more than 400 jobs as it tries to close a \$94 million budget deficit. The district will begin sending layoff notices this week.

The hundreds of positions being let go include teachers, bus drivers, counselors, cafeteria workers, and janitors. The meeting agenda outlined how at least 222 education credentialed employees, such as Science, Bilingual, and Special Education teachers will also be cut.

Educators, parents, and students have responded with a flurry of anger to the news. Many are correctly pointing out the fact that cuts to education are for the purpose of funneling more public funds into for-profit charter schools.

One educator posted online, “I’m telling you as an educator right now; public school is superior on average for learning because of its wide accessibility and socialization patterns. Funding public schools yields incredible results comparatively, charter and homeschooling is absolutely the wrong path and it’s becoming painfully obvious as I witness kids struggle with college admissions and graduating into the real world.”

Another added, “Or they could keep the teachers and get a lower teacher to student ratio, which has been demonstrated time and time again to yield better academic results.”

While another pointed out that, “It’s almost as if public schools shouldn’t be run as a business / corporate interest.”

Meanwhile the union, the San Diego Education Association (SDEA) which is planning a rally on March 26 at a school board meeting, will do little to nothing to prevent the layoffs with a decades long history of accepting job and budget cuts. On its

Facebook page the SDEA effectively took the side of the district in justifying the reductions, stating, “While there is a need for some staffing adjustments, due to declining enrollment, these district layoffs are not the most effective solution.”

Other school districts in San Diego County and across California also face severe budget cuts, layoffs, and school closures. The Grossmont Union District School Board, east of San Diego, recently voted to potentially eliminate 86 jobs in the next school year, while the Chula Vista School District voted to cut 100 jobs in a special weekend meeting. The South Bay Union School District is also considering campus closures due to declining enrollments.

School officials have tied the cuts to the fact that the third and final rounds of COVID relief funds will expire in September. The state and federal funds allowed the districts to hire more staff and teachers and even reduce some class sizes.

Since 2004, California has seen 500,000 fewer students enroll in schools. This is due to many factors including the high cost of living in the state and unaffordable housing compelling many families to move out of state.

Meanwhile continued budget cuts to public education only further push students into charter schools or homeschooling. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, enrollment in charters has increased throughout the US by two percent in the 2022-2023 school year. Additionally increased infections due to COVID-19 have resulted in prolonged health issues and Long Covid.

Many children are also facing homelessness, which affects their ability to attend school. According to a 2023 report from the National Center for Homeless Education, public schools across the US reported more

than 1.2 million homeless students as of the 2021-22 school year, accounting for 2.4 percent of all public school students, a 10 percent increase from the year prior.

Some counties throughout California have much higher rates of homeless student population such as Santa Barbara (12.3 percent) and Monterey (14.2 percent) given the high migrant population in the central coast of the state according to March 2024 figures from the Public Policy Institute of California.

San Diego Unified School District is the second largest in California and faces a \$93.7 million deficit but other school districts in the county are experiencing similar budget shortfalls. Grossmont Union High School District is primed to cut 43 jobs including a dean, three vice principals, 8 program specialists, 7 curriculum specialists and an alternative education principal.

Chula Vista Elementary, the fourth largest school district in San Diego County, serves more than 29,000 students at its combined 45 schools and employs 5,000 teachers and staff is not facing a budget deficit but still plans to cut more than 100 staff after pandemic funding expires next year. The school board approved cutting 132 full-time positions, including 55 classified and 77 certified.

Certified jobs include most teachers and administrators with some kind of teaching credential. Classified employees, like custodians, instructional aides, and others, do not require a teaching credential.

While the positions are being cut, some teachers may get their old jobs back from before the pandemic and other classified staff will be moved across the district to another open position.

San Diego Unified School District plans even more cuts after this year's layoffs. Even with 250 employees laid off and another 484 positions let go, it still faces a budget deficit of \$25 million next year. Another \$164 million shortfall is expected in the 2025-26 year.

The district received almost \$840 million in pandemic-era funds to combat high abstention rates and declining student enrollment. Employees of the district received a 10 percent retroactive raise and a 5 percent bump this year because of union contract agreements, which cost an additional \$517 million over a three-year period.

However these raises have not contributed to the

budget deficit as the latest projections show that the district spent \$850,000 less on teachers' salaries for the 2024-25 school year.

In the latest board meeting, officials stated that they will be able to meet budget expectations for the next two school years and have already begun to notify fired employees.

Elsewhere in the state, San Francisco faces a \$421 million budget deficit and is preparing to eliminate 927 positions. The Manhattan Beach Unified School District plans to cut 70 teachers in the next two years and increase class sizes. In the Anaheim Union High School District a recent unanimous school board decision to gut 10 percent of the operating budget including the layoffs of an estimated 120 teachers and staff, was met with opposition among students and parents last week.

Districts across the country are facing similar budget shortfalls and staff layoffs. Hundreds of schools are closing, thousands of staff are being laid off, and the end of critical support programs will impact countless students. The Biden Administration has refused to extend the Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds which will expire in September. The \$190 billion relief was meant to help schools survive the pandemic and make up for learning losses. Meanwhile, a record \$886.3 billion will be provided to the military, more than half of the government's discretionary spending.



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